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First name: Tristan

Last name: Dunlap

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service Representative,

As an avid outdoors person who has enjoyed years of mountain biking, backpacking, and skiing in the Northern Rockies, I feel compelled to voice constructive ideas and personal opinions during this Forest planning process. The Northern Rockies is a land of inspiration and I have an endless appreciation for what this place has to offer. Having spent many years exploring the Northern Rocky Mountains, including seven summers of backcountry employment with the USFS (four of those seasons on horseback as a Wilderness Ranger), I speak with conviction when I say that backcountry mountain bikers are generally seeking the same experience as other quiet backcountry users. From my personal experience, there isn't a big difference between spending ten hours in the saddle (of a horse), and ten hours in the saddle (of my bike). Downhill mountain biking is to backcountry riding what rodeo is to horse packing. Backcountry bikers are looking to explore remote lands, take in spectacular views, and experience the natural world.

It's commonly stated that mechanized travel is inconsistent with wilderness values. And while I support the idea of federally designated Wilderness excluding bikes strictly on the grounds of preventing technological advances from overtaking traditional use, I cannot support management directives that eliminate the best remaining backcountry mountain biking this area has to offer. The trails I speak of are those in places like the Great Burn, including the State Line Trail (Trail 738 in general, and particularly miles 20-27 which were recently closed). I recommend that the State Line Trail be managed in the same manner as the trails in the directly adjacent Lolo National Forest, as non-motorized backcountry (allowing mountain biking).

For the past 10 years I've found myself pondering the best way to provide a multitude of opportunities for diverse user groups. Given the shared interest in non-motorized backcountry trails by two low-impact user groups on the State Line trail, whose goals differ primarily on semantics, I have another suggestion. I propose that the Great Burn and State Line trail be managed using a bi-annual allowable uses. On odd numbered years, the trails would be open to mechanized use (bikes), while on even numbered years it would be horse and foot traffic only. I think that the merits of this system are two-fold. It provides those seeking a "wilderness" experience the opportunity to spend long stints of time in these lands without having to encounter mountain bikes. It also allows mountain bikers to travel these mountains and their great trails while satisfying their own need for wild spaces. This form of management would efficiently separate conflicting user groups while providing diverse opportunities. Other forms of trail time-sharing found often in urban areas are useless for managing "Wilderness" values, as are weekly and monthly closures, because at those time scales, recreational opportunities can be affected by the weather, seasonal snowpack, an early fall, or limitless other factors. On a yearly scale, the negatives are far fewer, because almost anyone can enjoy the resource in their own manner, either on a whim, or by careful planning, far in advance.

There is no doubt that through compromise and a progressive management plan, the wilderness character of the Great Burn and the other Recommended Wilderness lands on the Nez Perce National Forest can be maintained. It is my hope that a full range quiet recreational opportunities, including mountain biking, will be maintained in those plans.

Sincerely,

Tristan Dunlap